

MATTHEW

MAKING DISCIPLES
FOR THE NATIONS
Volume 2 (Chapters 14–28)
A 13-LESSON STUDY

REFORMED EXPOSITORY
BIBLE STUDY

JON NIELSON
and DANIEL M. DORIANI

MATTHEW

REFORMED EXPOSITORY BIBLE STUDIES

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

Studying the Bible will change your life. This is the consistent witness of Scripture and the experience of people all over the world, in every period of church history.

King David said, “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Ps. 19:7–8). So anyone who wants to be wiser and happier, and who wants to feel more alive, with a clearer perception of spiritual reality, should study the Scriptures.

Whether we study the Bible alone or with other Christians, it will change us from the inside out. The Reformed Expository Bible Studies provide tools for biblical transformation. Written as a companion to the Reformed Expository Commentary, this series of short books for personal or group study is designed to help people study the Bible for themselves, understand its message, and then apply its truths to daily life.

Each Bible study is introduced by a pastor-scholar who has written a full-length expository commentary on the same book of the Bible. The individual chapters start with the summary of a Bible passage, explaining **The Big Picture** of this portion of God’s Word. Then the questions in **Getting Started** introduce one or two of the passage’s main themes in ways that connect to life experience. These questions may be especially helpful for group leaders in generating lively conversation.

Understanding the Bible’s message starts with seeing what is actually there, which is where **Observing the Text** comes in. Then the Bible study provides a longer and more in-depth set of questions entitled **Understanding the Text**. These questions carefully guide students through the entire passage, verse by verse or section by section.

It is important not to read a Bible passage in isolation, but to see it in the wider context of Scripture. So each Bible study includes two **Bible Connections** questions that invite readers to investigate passages from other places in Scripture—passages that add important background, offer valuable contrasts or comparisons, and especially connect the main passage to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The next section is one of the most distinctive features of the Reformed Expository Bible Studies. The authors believe that the Bible teaches important doctrines of the Christian faith, and that reading biblical literature is enhanced when we know something about its underlying theology. The questions in **Theology Connections** identify some of these doctrines by bringing the Bible passage into conversation with creeds and confessions from the Reformed tradition, as well as with learned theologians of the church.

Our aim in all of this is to help ordinary Christians apply biblical truth to daily life. **Applying the Text** uses open-ended questions to get people thinking about sins that need to be confessed, attitudes that need to change, and areas of new obedience that need to come alive by the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. Finally, each study ends with a **Prayer Prompt** that invites Bible students to respond to what they are learning with petitions for God's help and words of praise and gratitude.

You will notice boxed quotations throughout the Bible study. These quotations come from one of the volumes in the Reformed Expository Commentary. Although the Bible study can stand alone and includes everything you need for a life-changing encounter with a book of the Bible, it is also intended to serve as a companion to a full commentary on the same biblical book. Reading the full commentary is especially useful for teachers who want to help their students answer the questions in the Bible study at a deeper level, as well as for students who wish to further enrich their own biblical understanding.

The people who worked together to produce this series of Bible studies have prayed that they will engage you more intimately with Scripture, producing the kind of spiritual transformation that only the Bible can bring.

Philip Graham Ryken
Coeditor of the Reformed Expository Commentary series

INTRODUCING MATTHEW

The four gospels are equally inspired and equally essential for the church. Yet Matthew can be described as the first gospel of the church. For centuries, church leaders believed it to be the first that was written. It also contains the greatest portion of teaching on the Christian life out of any of the gospels and offers the most guidance regarding the use of the Old Testament. It became the best known and most used gospel. Once that happened, scholars note, its status became self-perpetuating.

We often study Matthew a verse or chapter at a time—but Matthew is a complete historical narrative that has a grand purpose. Like the other gospels, Matthew is both a factual account of Jesus’s life and a faith-inviting testimony to the person and work of Jesus. The authors of all four gospels marshaled evidence that Jesus is Son of God and Savior in order that people might believe in him, receive his salvation, and follow him.

In its early chapters, Matthew establishes Jesus’s identity: He is Jesus—which means “God saves”—for he will save his people from their sins (1:1, 21). He is the Christ—the one who was anointed by God for a given task (1:1, 18). He is the son of David—the king of the Jews (1:1; 2:2). He is the son of Abraham; he will bring blessing to the nations (1:1, 17; see also Gen. 12:2–3). He is born of a virgin—born of the Holy Spirit (1:18–20). He is Immanuel—God with us (1:23). He is the king of the Jews (2:2), the sinless son of Adam, and the heir of Israel¹ (4:1–11). Eventually, the disciples know that he is “the Christ, the Son of living God” (16:16).

Most Jewish leaders, motivated in part by envy (27:18), thought that

1. For more on Jesus as the new Adam and the one true Israelite, see the accompanying Reformed Expository Commentary: Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew*, vol. 1, *Chapters 1–13* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 76–80.

he was dangerous—a lawbreaker who deluded the people—but both the crowds and the disciples accepted Jesus as a prophet, teacher, and healer. Yet he insisted that he is more: the Suffering Servant, the Son of Man who “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (20:28; see also vv. 26–27). Thus Jesus foretold his substitutionary death repeatedly (16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19), even if the disciples understood and believed only after his resurrection.

After the reader meets him in chapters 1–4 of Matthew, Jesus establishes in chapters 5–7 what it means to be a disciple. He then, in chapters 8–9, verifies the authority of his words through authoritative deeds—his miraculous healings. In chapter 10, after he calls the twelve disciples (or apostles), he sends them out to proclaim the kingdom. The response, as we see in chapters 11–12, is mixed; and Jesus explains in chapter 13 that the kingdom comes in a weak and hidden form, like seed scattered—not like armies marching. After a season when he is largely alone and is training the disciples, in chapters 14–18, Jesus returns to the public eye in chapters 19–20 and, in chapter 21, enters Jerusalem, where he judges the temple. After several days when he teaches in public and in private, in chapters 22–25, the leaders of Israel in chapters 26–27 make use of Judas’s betrayal to arrest, torment, try, and finally kill Jesus, with the cowardly complicity of Rome. This is history’s greatest tragedy and greatest injustice—yet it became God’s greatest victory when Jesus rose from death, in the flesh, on Easter morning, as we see in chapter 28. By his suffering he bore our sins, and by his life we live.

In contrast to the New Testament epistles, no gospel names its **author**. Still, from the first, the church universally testified that Matthew—one of the twelve, an eye- and earwitness of Jesus’s ministry, and a tax collector—wrote the first gospel. Its order and precision fit the idea that it was written by a man who kept orderly records. It is difficult to date Matthew, but evangelical scholars agree that chapter 24 of the book describes the fall of Jerusalem as a future event, meaning that Matthew had to be written before A.D. 70.

The question of the book’s **audience** is weightier than that of its date. While the gospels tell a single story, they differ regarding many of the details they highlight and the secondary goals that each one presents, and these differences offer hints about each author’s purpose. There is a consensus that

in some sense Matthew wrote for Jews. Clearly the readers who would most easily understand Matthew are Jewish readers. Of the four gospels, Matthew makes the most references to Jewish customs and regulations, touching on Sabbath regulations, divorce, ceremonial washing, fasting, taxes, phylacteries, tombs, and more. He also quotes the Old Testament six times in the first few chapters, to induce readers to see Jesus's life in terms of Israel's history and prophecies. Matthew even phrases Jesus's language for Jewish readers. For example, he generally says "kingdom of heaven" instead of "kingdom of God," since observant Jews tried to avoid using God's name. Matthew also presents Jesus's life in ways that would appeal to Israelites. So Jesus is the Messiah, and his genealogy goes back to Abraham, the father of the Jews, and to David, the king of the Jews. The account of magi coming to worship Jesus fulfills Jewish expectations that the nations would come to Jerusalem. And Jesus often speaks of the law, rightly interpreted, as a means of promoting righteousness (Matt. 5–6, 23)—something that surely appealed to Jews.

Yet Matthew has great interest in Gentiles too. While his genealogy of Jesus (1:1–17) traces back to Abraham, the father of the Jews, it also mentions Gentile women: Rahab and Ruth (v. 5). In the birth narratives that he presents, only Gentiles worship Jesus; while Herod, the scribes, and the people of Jerusalem are hostile or indifferent (2:1–15). Jesus's ministry begins in "Galilee of the Gentiles" (4:15), and he heals people from the Gentile lands (4:17–25). Even within Israel's borders, an early miracle of Jesus benefits a Gentile—a centurion—whom he praises for showing faith that exceeds that which he has found in Israel (8:5–13). Jesus focuses on the lost sheep of Israel (10:5–6), but he also ministers to Gentiles whom he meets (15:21–28).

So it is best to say that Matthew wrote to move Jews to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and to equip believing Jews to take the message of Jesus, the Savior and Lord, to the Gentiles. In his call for Israel to believe, Jesus also warned them of the consequences of unbelief. If they rejected his message, they would be "thrown into the outer darkness" (8:12). If they failed to bear fruit for God, Jesus told them that "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits" (21:43). So the gospel of Matthew urges Israel to receive its Messiah, to bear appropriate fruit, and to share its faith with the nations.

Matthew states his great **purpose** as he concludes. When Jesus

commissioned the disciples to “make disciples of all nations” and to “observe all that [he had] commanded” (28:19–20), he was speaking both to them and to all church generations that were to follow (2 Tim. 2:2). Of the four gospels, Matthew dedicates the most of its space to Jesus’s teaching. That teaching addresses most of the issues that faced his disciples in that age and would go on to face them in every age.

All gospels present two truths: it is hard to be a disciple, and yet anyone can be a disciple. Matthew encourages his reader to identify with the Twelve as they grow in discipleship. Throughout his gospel, he shows Jesus describing the Twelve with the distinct term *oligopistos*, which means “of little faith” (Matt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8—see also Luke 12:28). This suggests that they have *some* faith. They may be weak, they may err, but they also grow until the end and become apostles—ones who are ready to hear and implement the Great Commission. When Jesus describes them this way, we read it as a direct address: “*you* of little faith.” Thus Jesus wants *us* to share the experience of the first apostles. *We* should grow from having a little faith to having a strong faith, so that we can make disciples in our generation among both Jews and Gentiles and inspire other generations to come.

Matthew’s orderly mind and zeal for Jesus’s teachings give his gospel a unique double **structure**. It describes Jesus’s life in a series of narrative phases and also intersperses five key discourses throughout the action.

The Origin, Birth, and Identity of Jesus (1:1–2:23)

The Preparation and Early Ministry in Galilee (3:1–4:25)

The First Discourse: Discipleship in Jesus’s Kingdom (5:1–7:29)

The Kingdom’s Growth under Jesus’s Authority (8:1–10:42)

The Second Discourse: The Disciples Follow Jesus into Mission
(10:1–11:1)

The Kingdom’s Growth in the Face of Resistance (11:2–13:58)

The Third Discourse: Parables of the Kingdom (13:1–52)

Training the Disciples among Crowds and Leaders

(14:1–20:34)

The Fourth Discourse: Community Life in the Kingdom
(18:1–35)

Conflict and Teaching in Jerusalem (21:1–23:39)

The Fifth Discourse: Trouble, Perseverance, and the Eschaton
 (24:1–25:46)

Death, and Resurrection (26:1–28:20)

Each discourse begins by mentioning an audience for Jesus’s teaching. Each ends with a variation of the phrase “when Jesus had finished saying these things . . .” And each block of teaching fits perfectly within the rest of the gospel story. As crowds flock to Jesus in Matthew 4, he offers the Sermon on the Mount (First Discourse), which describes the thoughts and deeds of a disciple. After he ministers widely and calls the Twelve to join him, he describes their mission and the mindset they must bring to it (Second Discourse). When Jewish society largely rejects Jesus, he explains how his kingdom comes (Third Discourse). After he instructs the disciples, he teaches them how to live in community (Fourth Discourse). As he prepares to die, he describes the future of Israel, the disciples, and mankind (Fifth Discourse). Thus Jesus delivers five discourses, which echo the five books of Moses and guide his disciples who live in Israel, throughout the empire, and beyond—which includes us in the present day. So Matthew both wrote and organized his gospel in order that we may believe, become disciples, and make disciples in turn.

Daniel M. Doriani

Coeditor of the Reformed Expository Commentary series

Coeditor of the Reformed Expository Bible Study series

Author of *Matthew* (REC)

LESSON 1

A GRACIOUS AND GENTLE KING

Matthew 14:1–33

THE BIG PICTURE

As we begin our study of the second half of Matthew’s gospel, it is good for us to review where we have come so far. Matthew introduces Jesus to us as the promised King of the Jews, the long-awaited Messiah, and the very Son of God. We have seen Jesus as the great Teacher who authoritatively preaches and applies the law of God to God’s people. We have seen that he is the Healer as he demonstrates his authority over disease, disability, and even death itself. We have seen that he is the Lord as he calms waves and rules over the powers of the demonic world. But we have also begun to see the anger, hatred, and envy that has risen in the religious leaders as Jesus’s popularity has grown. Jesus, the Son of God, will be accepted by some, ignored by others, and brutally rejected by many. This King, Savior, Messiah, Teacher, Healer, and Lord has come to suffer, to die, and to redeem God’s sinful people through a cross.

John the Baptist tastes death before Jesus does, and it is with his death that our passage for today opens (14:1–12). Matthew informs us that John has been boldly and prophetically confronting King Herod about his sin, which has made him an enemy in Herodias, the queen. In a moment when the king has left himself vulnerable, Herodias demands John’s head on a platter—a request that the king grants. Upon hearing the news, Jesus withdraws to a “desolate place” by himself but is almost immediately surrounded by crowds yet again (14:13–14). As the hour grows late, he miraculously multiplies fish

and loaves so that they feed more than five thousand people—demonstrating yet again his power and divinity (14:15–21). His disciples depart ahead of him on a boat across the Sea of Galilee, and Jesus comes walking out to them on the water—again showing them the power and authority he has over all creation (14:22–33). Peter briefly joins him, on the surface of the water, before beginning to sink beneath the waves because of his doubt. As Jesus brings Peter back into the boat with the other disciples, they all conclude in worshipful amazement, “Truly you are the Son of God” (v. 33).

Read Matthew 14:1–33.

GETTING STARTED

1. Why do so many people in our culture today avoid thinking about death—and particularly about their own mortality? What are some strategies that people use to push away thoughts of death?

2. When you have struggled in your Christian journey with doubts or weak faith, what truths, resources, or people have pointed you back to Jesus, his gospel, and the promises of God’s Word?

Awaiting the Proper Time, pgs. 7–8

Jesus did not withdraw because he was afraid to die, but because it was not yet time for him to die. Indeed, months later, Jesus died much as John did—murdered by unjust rulers for telling the truth. . . . John died as an individual; Jesus died as a representative of the human race, in the place of all who believe in him.

OBSERVING THE TEXT

3. While it may not seem so at first glance, the first two sections of this passage—14:1–12 and 14:13–21—could be described as telling a tale of two very different kinds of kings. How might Matthew, in these two sections, be contrasting King Herod with King Jesus? What are their values? How do they treat their people?

4. Consider what Matthew reveals to us in this passage about the heart of Jesus. How does Jesus demonstrate care for the crowds? In what ways is he patient, gentle, and kind when interacting with his disciples?

5. What is encouraging about Peter's actions, and Jesus's response to him, in 14:22–33? What is discouraging about this account? Who do the disciples identify as being worthy of our ultimate worship, hope, and trust (v. 33)?

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

6. How does John the Baptist demonstrate courage and conviction before King Herod (14:1–5)? What surprising events, and incredibly foolish actions, lead to John’s death? What can we learn from this sad account?

7. Why might Jesus have withdrawn to a “desolate place” following the news of what had happened to John the Baptist (14:13)? Why might the crowds have followed Jesus there? What did they expect to see and experience?

8. How do the disciples initially respond to the fact that there is no food for the people who have gathered around Jesus (14:15)? What does this reveal about their priorities—and perhaps about their lack of understanding?

Bread in the Wilderness, pgs. 22–23

In the spring, near the Passover (John 6:4), Jesus told the hungry people of Israel to recline on the green grass and prepare for a feast. Passover celebrated Israel’s redemption from Egypt. After the Passover, Moses gave the people manna in the wilderness. Now Jesus gives his people bread in the wilderness.

9. Jesus's feeding of the five thousand is different from the healings he has been performing—this miracle, while amazing, provides only one meal that is soon finished. Yet, by providing it, what might Jesus be seeking to teach his disciples and the crowds about his identity? How is this miraculous feeding reminiscent of the way God cared for his people in the Old Testament?

10. How is Jesus again demonstrating his identity and power to his disciples as he walks to them on the water (14:22–27)? What is their initial response to him—and why might they be responding in this way?

11. What does Matthew seem to want us to notice about Peter—regarding both his initial response to Jesus and his subsequent fear and sinking into the water (14:28–31)? How does Matthew conclude this passage, and what does he call his readers to conclude about the identity of Jesus (14:32–33)?

BIBLE CONNECTIONS

12. Read Exodus 14:21–29. How did God, through Moses, command the waters to do his bidding for the sake of his people? How might this passage have shaped the way that Matthew's Jewish audience would have understood today's account of Jesus walking on the water?

13. Read Exodus 16:1–5. Why might this passage have been in Jesus’s mind during his miraculous feeding of the five thousand? As you approach the account of this miracle with the same passage now in your own mind, what deeper meaning does Exodus 16 lend to this account?

THEOLOGY CONNECTIONS

14. The Westminster Confession of Faith credits the triune God with the creation of the universe: “It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good” (4.1). How does Jesus demonstrate the power and authority that belong to him, as the Creator, in the passage we studied for today’s lesson?

15. The Westminster Confession of Faith describes *sanctification* as an ongoing struggle, or war, for holiness—one in which “the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail” (13.3). How do Peter’s doubt and fear “prevail,” for a time, as he tries to walk to Jesus on the water? Why is Jesus’s response to him so comforting to *us* as we consider our own failure, growth, and sanctification?

PRAYER PROMPT

As King Herod slaughtered a faithful prophet of God, King Jesus graciously provided a meal for the crowds who had come to him in need. This is your King—your Savior. Today, thank God for the grace he has shown you in Jesus. Praise him for his patience with you as you, like Peter, learn to trust him more deeply. Ask him to fill you with love, worship, and praise for the one who truly is the Lord of all creation and the very Son of God!